5-Year Plan (2011 to 2016)
Columbia Conservation District

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Organization of the Columbia Conservation District

- Established June 29, 1949 as a political subdivision of the State of Washington with authorities and structure outlined in Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 89.08.

Function of the Columbia Conservation District

- To take available technical, financial and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local land manager with conservation of soil, water and related natural resources.

We Serve & Why

- The people who own, manage, or utilize the natural resources.

Mission of the Columbia Conservation District

- "Mission of Columbia Conservation District is to provide the needed support to people who own, manage, or utilize the natural resources so their activities will enhance the region's natural resources while ensuring the quality of life & culture these resources provide."

Vision of the Columbia Conservation District

- Columbia County residents will be enabled to implement stewardship of our natural resources through voluntary practices without compromise to economic viability or social standards of the region.

Values of the Columbia Conservation District

1) To promote economically feasible conservation practices in Columbia County that insure minimum soil erosion and acceptable air and water quality to meet the needs of agriculture and other consumers, while protecting the future for our youth.
2) To protect private property rights
3) An entity that supports and protects the land manager
4) To promote continued voluntary participation of landowners and operators as cooperators in this Conservation District. Each operator is encouraged to develop a viable and effective resource management plan.
5) To monitor proposed land conversion from agricultural purposes in order to insure compliance with the intent of the Columbia County Comprehensive plan.
6) To operate and supervise Columbia County conservation efforts in a way that emphasizes local control and avoids over-regulation of state or federal agencies.
7) To explore funding sources to provide sufficient annual income to offset current and anticipated future expenditures.

Natural Resource Priorities (in priority order)

1. Leadership to New Generation Conservation (education, outreach, research, visionary, on-ground conservation implementation & demonstration)
2. Soil quality & conservation (research, organic matter, microbial, health, infiltration, erosion control)
3. Renewable Energy & Biomass Alternatives (biodiesel, ethanol, solar, wind, straw & forest products)
4. Water Quality & Quantity(confined animals, TMDLs, practices application, WRIA implementation, residue management, in-stream, fisheries habitat, etc)
5. Air Quality (reduced emissions, PM 2.5 levels, dust)
6. Forest, Range, and Fire Management (invasive species, noxious weeds, fuel reduction, CWPP, CRM)
7. Wildlife Impacts on Production Agriculture (crop damage, livestock predation, water availability, ESA recovery impacts)

(District Operations & Cost Share in all the above)

Natural Resource Priorities, Measures of Success and Goals:

1. Leadership to New Generation Conservation (education, outreach, research, visionary, on-ground conservation implementation & demonstration)
Measures:
- reduction in numbers of people not practicing conservation on the ground (plans & implementation) in county
- numbers of people actively working with the conservation district

Goal: By February 2015 have a reduction in the numbers of people not practicing conservation on the ground (plans & implementation) in the county and an increase in numbers of people actively working with the conservation district

Strategies:
- CD get equipment to lease out to farmers that would help reduce burning. (eg. Choppers, mowers, straw balers)(no till drills that can handle high residues) Facilitate equipment rental/access, dealers, leases, grants (SCCD Loan Program)
- CD help coordinate programs to take sensitive ground out of production.
- Tour – Look at varieties that do well under direct seed rather than summer fallow varieties. Trials that better represent growing conditions of district producers.
- Education for other than producers. Education &expose non producers to agriculture & conservation. – Ag in the classroom, tours involve sportsmen organizations.
- Use Pheasants Forever or other groups for support. Liaison to leverage and make programs profitable for owners/producers.
- Maybe include the Umatilla Program information in a letter or a newsletter to landowners and tell them who they contact.
- Develop mentoring program for young farmers to encourage continued conservation practices.
- Work with WSU Extension to help develop budget management tools. Budget tools need real life practice costs and rates to develop usable tools.

2. Soil Quality & Conservation (research, organic matter, microbial, health, infiltration, erosion control)
Measures:
- acres in conservation systems
- reduction in visible erosion (annual & timing of field review)
- acres with improved soil quality (organic matter, infiltration, biological activity, nutrient balance, ph)

Goal: By February 2015 have a demonstrated increase in acres in conservation systems, a reduction in visible erosion (annual & timing of field review) and increase in acres with improved soil quality (organic matter, infiltration, biological activity, nutrient balance, ph)

Strategies:
- Technical Assistance to help with CRP take-out.
- Tour of CRP take out examples.
- CD help coordinate programs to take sensitive ground out of production.
- Research to look at pH changes, nematodes, wireworms, etc.
- The value of microbial activity of soils (besides rotations) and how to improve the activity. Ann Kennedy and Jill Clapperton, facilitate communications with research opportunities, annual meeting presentation, include in spring tour??
- Direct Seed/Mulch till cost share promotion to help reduce burning for air quality and reduced soil erosion. $15 is not enough. Good to burn one field and not burn next to it for a comparison. Continue to explore costshare options to include production penalty compensation.
- Soil Testing – district explore options for contracting out this service to others or consider developing a soils lab thru the district.
- Develop a position on wheat straw removal concerning nutrient removal and soil organic content levels

3. Renewable Energy & Biomass Alternatives (biodiesel, ethanol, solar, wind, straw & forest products)
Measures:

- feasibility study completed (by 2011)
- research or other projects completed
- partnership outreach and development

Goal: By February 2015 have completed a feasibility study completed (by 2011), have identified research needed and completed projects and built a partnership for renewable energy & biomass alternatives

Strategies:

- Develop a position on wheat straw removal concerning nutrient removal and soil organic content levels.

4. Water Quality & Quantity (confined animals, TMDLs, practices application, WRIA, residue management, etc)
Measures:

- reduction in Ecology referrals
- number of practices implemented
- number of land managers served
- water quality & flow improvements

Goal: By February 2015 have a demonstrated reduction in Ecology referrals, an increase in number of practices implemented, an increase in number of land managers served, and improvements in water quality & flow.

Strategies:

- Irrigation efficiency. Are there additional opportunities for program implementation including "Water Banking" for Walla Walla Basin (Touchet) producers.
- Water quality – Cows in the Creek, DOE LIWQ concerns. Watershed/buffers, riparian areas. CCD needs to be aware that since the transition of the Walla Walla Watershed Planning Unit to the Partnership, WRIA 32 (focus is on water management) there is no advocacy or defensive group concerning the Dept. of Ecology TMDL program and it's potential impact on dryland agriculture. The "draft" Tucannon TMDL will be out for public comment in February and the potential budget cuts on the watershed program could put WRIA 35 actions in the same position.
- Work with cattle/livestock producers to identify areas that could help them with conservation concerns. Offer topics at the annual meeting for them.

5. Air Quality (reduced emissions, PM 2.5 levels, dust)
Measures:

- number of practices implemented
- number of land managers served
- reduction in acres burned

Goal: By February 2015 have a demonstrated increase in the number of practices implemented, the number of land managers served, and a reduction in acres burned

Strategies:

- Direct Seed/Mulch till cost share promotion to help reduce burning for air quality and reduced soil erosion. $15 is not enough. Good to burn one field and not burn next to it for a comparison. Continue to explore cost share options to include production penalty compensation.
- Work on ways to reduce burning as a management tool; increased rates. Acreages have reduced little in the last 6 years other than following the 2006 fire.

6. Forest, Range, and Fire Management (invasive species, noxious weeds, fuel reduction, CWPP, CRM)
Measures:

- acres of forest, range and fire management assessments
- forest, range and/or fuel reduction plans developed
- number of land managers served

Goal: By February 2015 have a demonstrated increase in number of practices implemented, the number of land managers served and a reduction in acres burned

Strategies:

- Do things to help prevent catastrophic fires. Prevention/planning (implement Firewise program and coordinate with RCD on CWPP implementation). Such as cutting vegetation back from roads (cut back borders or wide fire breaks) (These are great for wildlife since provide more edge.)
- Trees on the Palouse - program for large eyebrows.

7. Wildlife Impacts on Production Agriculture (crop damage, livestock predation, water availability, ESA recovery impacts)
Measures:

- Dollars lost from wildlife impacts
- CREP acreage signup
- Acreage lost from production agriculture

Goal: By February 2015 have a decrease in dollars lost from wildlife impacts, have an increase in CREP acreage signup, and a reduction in acreage lost from production agriculture

Priority Geographic Areas

- Entire county with emphasis on upland treatments – private and public

Information – Education Priorities and Goals:

Goal - By 2014, have reached 80% of the citizens in Columbia CD with an education event of some kind.

Actions:

1. Neighborhood meetings
2. Producer tours, demonstrations, annual grower meeting
3. Continue Camp Wooten activity, soil stewardship, salmon in classroom, fair booth
4. Soil judging contest
5. Examine Envirothon program – approach FFA advisor, and science teacher

District Operations Priorities, Goals:

Goals: a) Annually, each staff member will attend 2 training sessions associated with operational and/or programmatic efficiencies.
b) By end of 2016 district filing will be updated and historic files archived.
c) Supervisor's will attend WACD SE Area and State Annual meetings.

District Operations -- Cost Share

Measure:

- Dollars for on ground conservation work
- Number of people served
- Number of conservation practices implemented
- Goals accomplished

Goal: By February 2015 have an increase of dollars for on ground conservation work, the number of people served, the number of conservation practices implemented and goals accomplished.

Strategies:

- Help producers keep track of signup deadlines and programs like EQIP, WHIP, CSP, State programs, etc. (Timely communications with producers)
- Maybe include the Umatilla Program information in a letter or a newsletter to landowners and tell them who they contact.

Trends Impacting Conservation in the Columbia Conservation District

- Salmon recovery is a driving force – fish related funding sources
- Burn issues have been a serious issue consuming a lot of time
- Economics of agriculture – as economics get tougher it is harder for conservationists to do conservation – less willing to participate in conservation projects – economic uncertainty
- Soil and water quality issues and programs are growing in number and diversity – need to get going in the direction we need to for Columbia CD
- Watershed planning goals have been developed with citizen involvement – acceptance of upland planning in four watershed plans with specifics in each watershed
- Cultural resources is a monster – no streamlined approach – just now finding our way through the process
- Enhancing of fish habitat
- Direct seed helping to reduce tillage
- Growth of the district programs
- Go between land managers and regulatory agencies
- Multiple – regional scale projects and planning efforts – our county is split between two WRIAs – region salmon recovery efforts – moved from our district boundaries to region boundaries
- Regulatory burdens and changes increased
- Relationship between district board, WACD Committees, WSCC regarding policy development
- Local Work Group process improving – working through our tensions, priorities, identify resource priorities and issues and a mechanism to address
- Cost of production and crop insurances impacting cropping decisions and conservation practice application
- Government payments are necessary as part of the rural economy
- Practices with public benefit needing cost share from public – more consistency needed in the system – should not be a make-money scheme
- Use land owners and/or land managers as terminology for our clients
- Conservation payments can increase – example CSP
- Recognize an increase in non-inversion tillage
- New technology impacting residue management

- Increasing renewable energies

Resource Data:

- The District encompasses all of Columbia County. Of the 558,701 acres: 346,789 acres are managed by private landowners/operators; 210,682 are public lands (USFS, BPA, CTUIR, WDFW & WDNR); and 1,230 acres are within communities.
- EQIP contracts have been changing to confined animal, forestry, still with interest in dryland conservation activity
- Still having to chase programs where funding sources are available, workload oriented – need more flexibility and timing)

Staffing Needs

District Manager
Fiscal Manager/Administrative Assistant
Project Manager/District Assistant
Cluster Engineer (part-time)
Technician (new)
Technical Consultant (contract basis)
Biological Consultant (contract basis)
Engineering (contract basis).

Annual Budget Needs

Salary & Benefits	$ 169,000
Contract Services	$ 13,200
Equipment	$ 5,300
Office Supplies	$ 6,700
Materials	$ 15,000
Programs & Cost Share	$ 789,100
Rent & Utilities & Communication	$ 9,000
Transportation	$ 8,300
Training	$ 3,000
Other (WACD & NACD dues)	$ 2,400
Total Annual Budget Need	**$1,021,000**

Key Decision Makers

16th District elected officials	Secretary of Agriculture
NW Planning Council	Members of Congress and Staff
BPA	County Commissioners
WSCC	Cooperating Agencies – local, state, federal
WACD	Land Managers/Owners

Greatest Natural Resource Accomplishment in the Next 5 Years:

- Provide the technical and cost share assistance to producers to effect water quality issues – Tucannon and Touchet - provide the leadership and buffer between producers, partners, and agencies – continue to ensure our role in watershed planning and implementation activities
- Promoting the ability to direct seed under the most adverse conditions (high residue)
- Eliminate chemical fallow burning in entirety, reduce fall burn by 50% and spring burn by 25%, and increase high residue direct seed increase on numbers of acres impacted
- Have research on disease, yield, economics with direct seeding
- Help producers experiment and transition to a direct seed system of less burning
- Help producers in taking out CRP and find cost effective programs to leave CRP acreage in grass
- Maintain viability of the family farm to remain in business
- Get all producers to believe soil erosion can be reduced and their businesses can be successful at the same time
- Better understanding of public works projects and aid in bringing in more visionary projects

BELOW IS MATERIAL SHOWN ON THE 5 YEAR PLAN TO PROVIDE ACTIONS FOR FUTURE ANNUAL PLANS OF WORK

Benchmarks, Timeline, & Actions:

1. Leadership to New Generation Conservation (education, outreach, research, visionary, on-ground conservation implementation & demonstration)

Measurable Goal:
By February 2015 have a reduction in the numbers of people not practicing conservation on the ground (plans & implementation) in the county and an increase in numbers of people actively working with the conservation district

Benchmark	Timeline	Actions
Completed feasibility study	By February 2011	To proceed with straw removal and pulping and extracting to see where it will take of local community needs.
Erosion tour	By February 2011	By next fall have in place an informational tour with demonstration to encompass low/med/high rainfall zones
Purchase equipment to reduce emissions	By February 2012	Put equipment to use to prove that it works and reduces air borne particulates but yet still an economical option
Develop usable tools	By February 2013	Educate and expose non-producers to agriculture, continue support of agricultural in classroom and others – non-profit organization

2. Soil Quality & Conservation (research, organic matter, microbial, health, infiltration, erosion control)

Measurable Goal:
By February 2015 have a demonstrated increase in acres in conservation systems, a reduction in visible erosion (annual & timing of field review) and increase in acres with improved soil quality (organic matter, infiltration, biological activity, nutrient balance, ph)

Benchmark	Timeline	Actions
Start documenting how various farming systems impact erosion	Start by March 10 & continue annually	Tour in February or March each year with at least one supervisor and one research oriented person
Release conclusions or trends or trends or theories on benchmark #1	Start January 2011	Present at annual conservation district growers meeting
More producers implementing erosion reducing farming practices	Now & ongoing	Cost share for practices Assistance to producer in securing equipment for practices
Improve soil quality characteristics	By 2015	Get Anne Kennedy on our annual spring tour Cost share some soil samples of native ground vs. farmed ground Cost share, educate, and mentor farmers to help with direct seed and rotations

3. Renewable Energy & Biomass Alternatives (biodiesel, ethanol, solar, wind, straw & forest products)

Measurable Goal:
By February 2015 have completed a feasibility study completed (by 2011), have identified research needed and completed projects and built a partnership for renewable energy & biomass alternatives.

Benchmark	Timeline	Actions
Completed feasibility study	September 2010	Disseminate information
Measurement of impacted lands by wind turbine development	September 2013	

4. Water Quality & Quantity (confined animals, TMDLs, practices application, WRIA, residue management, etc)

Measurable Goal:
By February 2015 have a demonstrated reduction in Ecology referrals, an increase in number of practices implemented, an increase in number of land managers served, and improvements in water quality & flow.

Benchmark	Timeline	Actions
Reduction in Ecology referrals	annually	• Provide technical assistance and/or cost share to referrals.
Landowners served	annually	• Numbers of technical assistance and/or cost share contracts developed & implemented • Annual meeting and tour – cooperator participation
Practice implementation	annually	• Number of cost share contracts implemented
Water quality and flow improvements	February 2013 and 2015	• TMDL classifications by Ecology • Amount of water placed in "trust" • Practice implementation addressing TMDL implementation plan

5. Air Quality (reduced emissions, PM 2.5 levels, dust)

Measurable Goal:
By February 2015 effect a demonstrated increase in the number of practices implemented, the number of land managers served, and a reduction in acres burned.

Benchmark	Timeline	Actions
New District cost share program for direct seed	February 2011	To reduce burning while direct seeding in high residue.
Find out how the cost share program is working	February 2012	Find out how many producers this is helping or not helping or effecting
25% reduction in acres burned	February 2013	Find out if the past 2 years are helping to start producers realize less burning
50% reduction in acres burned	February 2014	Try to reduce burning 50% from 2010 levels through increased cost share programs and equipment demonstrations

6. Forest, Range, and Fire Management (invasive species, noxious weeds, fuel reduction, CWPP, CRM)

Measurable Goal:
By February 2015 have a demonstrated increase in number of practices implemented, the number of land managers served and a reduction in acres burned.

Benchmark	Timeline	Actions
Review CWPP & develop assessment		Look at priorities and develop assessment
Assess fuels		Meet with producers and people to ground truth
Develop plans		Meet with producers/landowners to write plans
Find funding		Find cost share programs to implement plans

7.Wildlife Impacts on Production Agriculture (crop damage, livestock predation, water availability, ESA recovery impacts)

Measurable Goal:
February 2015 have a decrease in dollars lost from wildlife impacts, have an increase in CREP acreage signup, and a reduction in acreage lost from production agriculture.

Benchmark	Timeline	Actions
Include statement in old plan		
Work with state fish and wildlife	February 2011	Control activities
Encourage funding for losses in state and federal budgets	February 2011	Work on state and federal funding
Work with cooperators on opening up lands	February 2013	Opening up lands for needed or desired control
Improve wildlife habitat	February 2015	Habitat projects away from production acres

8.District Operations & Cost Share

Measurable Goal: By February 2015 have an increase of dollars for on ground conservation work, the number of people served, the number of conservation practices implemented and goals accomplished.

Benchmark	Timeline	Actions
Identify producers by type and need currently working with	February 2011	• Track producer contacts
Develop production survey / interview process	February 2012	• Take information from produce contacts and move to development of survey
Personal interviews and meeting with producers to complete survey	February 2013	• One on one meetings
Identify two new cost share sources	February 2013	• Review partner agency programs for joint funding • Work with local agriculture improvement association for cost share potential

Washington Conservation Districts assisting land managers with their conservation choices